

STEP



Strategic Theological Education Partnerships

Theological Libraries:

The Unsung Hero of Theological Education

It has been said that Baptists, in general, are not avid readers. Is that true? We hope not! As theological educators we have a passion to encourage the study and reading of quality books on all aspects of doctrine, Christian life, and ministry. Above all, students, pastors, and Christian leaders must be readers. The Apostle Paul illustrates the importance of reading when he requested of Timothy, “When you come bring the cloak ...and the books, especially the parchments” (2 Timothy 4:13).

The seminary library is the best place to foster this discipline. According to the Association of Theological Schools, “Theological libraries are the intellectual heart of theological education. They provide not only resources but also the environment essential for critical reflection and spiritual formation.” Craig Carter, in his book *Invitation to the Old Testament*, writes that “theological study requires access to a wide range of resources; thus, a comprehensive theological library is indispensable to the formation of pastors and scholars.” These are bold claims. If true, then the development of a good theological library is vital to the completion of our mission as theological educators. However, a good library is not developed haphazardly. It requires planned and careful attention to both the library collection as well as the library environment.

In this issue we will discuss the importance of theological libraries. First, we include a portion of the chapter “Excellence in Libraries” from Steve Hardy’s book *Excellence in Theological Education*. Second, we will hear from BMM missionary Ed Alexander about the Seminario Batista Regular do Sul in Curitiba, Brazil. Finally, BMM missionary to the Dominican Republic and Director of Seminario Bautista Internacional, James Peavy, orients us to the opportunities of digital libraries.

Excellence in Libraries

Steven A. Hardy, "Excellence in Libraries," in *Excellence in Theological Education* (Carlisle: Langham Global Library, 2016), 129-136. Used with permission.



An excellent library is systematically collected according to a selection policy built on the mission statement of the library and of the school. Trained personnel organize it for maximum usefulness to both students and faculty. The good libraries of the future will not be built on printed materials alone but will take full advantage of information available globally through information technology.

A library should be one of the most important resources that a theological institution has. It also may be its most expensive facility. Theological education programs require libraries that are both useful and used. The library makes available the materials that students and teachers need for the courses offered. It is a place of research to allow students to gain perspective from what others have thought, along with illustrations, samples and models of what others have done. Archives and other historical records stored in the library help us remember our history. The library should contain up-to-date reference and resource tools, such as dictionaries, encyclopedias, atlases, commentaries, and language tools. It needs to receive and keep magazines, newspapers, and professional journals.

Yet for much of the non-Western world, libraries are not treated as important aspects of the educational process. Students (and many teachers) may not know how to use a library. The library has little budget, and its collection is often made up of donated books, old dictionaries, and commentaries. No one uses it other than during the prescribed hours when it becomes a study

hall for students to read the multiple copies of textbooks kept there.

One of our biggest needs, even before we try to strengthen the library collection, is to help students and staff to understand what a library is and how it can be used to make training programs excellent. Our library staff also needs to learn how to better serve our teachers, students, and staff.

What Is a Library?

A library is a collection of books and other materials organized for use. This definition has several key words:

1. A library is a collection, not an accumulation. We should not be impressed merely by the number of books on a library's shelves. What matters is that each item is there because of what it contributes to the whole. A copy of Richard Nixon's campaign biography from the 1972 US election contributes absolutely nothing to your theological collection. In order to collect, instead of simply accumulating, we need to know what kinds of materials are needed to support the courses offered to our students. We also need to be aware of what materials exist and what kind of budget we have in order to carefully prioritize what materials can be acquired to strengthen our collection.

2. A library includes materials, not just books. It should also have magazines and periodicals that relate to the social or political realities of the region as well as professional journals in areas that the curriculum covers, such as biblical studies, missions, practical theology or education. A library will likely have videos or audio-visual materials, such as sermons or documentaries, that provide background or illustrations for course offerings. Libraries increasingly should have electronic tools and searchable CDs that allow students and faculty to access an almost incomprehensible amount of research materials through the internet. A library could also have archival materials to help

us remember the history of the school, church denominations or Christian organizations in the region.

3. A library is organized. Its materials are not merely crowded onto shelves. It could be organized by broad categories like Bible, missions, or pastoral counseling, or by using detailed systems like the Dewey Decimal Classification, the Library of Congress, or the Universal Decimal System. The goal is to organize the materials so they can be found, so don't complicate your system!

4. A library is to be used. In the Middle Ages handwritten manuscripts were chained to desks or locked in trunks in order to preserve them. While you may have precious historical documents that need protection, for most of your collection the goal is that the materials be used, not protected. The location of a library, its hours of use and the system designed for borrowing books should be based on how materials can best be made available for the use of students and faculty – not on what might be most convenient for the library's staff.

Building the Library Collection

A library with 20,000 irrelevant or outdated books is far less useful than a library with 2,000 carefully selected titles. A library should have a selection policy with priorities for what will or will not go into the collection. You also should have a weeding policy to eliminate what should not be there. Not every donation is worth putting on our shelves. Neither will we be able to purchase every book or journal that we want. Choices must be made according to well-considered priorities.

A selection policy should have the input of lots of people and once formulated, it should have official approval by the administration and faculty. It needs to consider the following questions:

- Who will benefit from the library? Only students? Faculty preparing for their classes?

Graduate students needing to do specialized advanced research? Pastors and lay leaders from the region? The general public?

- Who has the authority to make decisions about whether a gift should be accepted or a book purchased?
- What process will be followed for the library staff to know what materials are needed to support the courses being offered?

The Librarians' Manual is an excellent tool that has been developed by the Association of Christian Librarians' Commission for International Library Assistance (CILA, <http://www.acl.org/cila.cfm>). This manual suggests the following guidelines for a selection policy:

Top priority should be given to materials which are most necessary for regular use in the present curriculum and for planned future development of new courses.

a. Students need books written in non-technical, age-appropriate language, to supplement standard textbooks or class notes.

b. Teachers need materials that cover the subject matter in greater depth. By maintaining a balance between the purchase of proven classics, primary literature, and up-to-date texts or secondary information, your collection should primarily support the curriculum.

c. A reasonable balance in the number of materials bought for each subject should be maintained.

d. Generally, standard textbooks should not be considered for purchase [for the library]. Often textbooks are quite costly and become quickly outdated...¹

It is not ideal if the library is the primary place for students to have access to their textbooks. It is better if students can acquire their own copies of the books they are studying. This helps them

¹ LeAnne Hardy, Linda Lambert, and Ferne Weimer, *The Librarian's Manual*, Revised and Expanded Edition (Cedarville, OH: ACL, 2008), 33.

to begin building their own libraries, which for many may be the only library to which they have access for the rest of their ministry lives.

Your teachers are the best source of suggestions about books and materials that are needed in the library, although the reality of budgetary issues and the need for a balanced collection mean that we may not be able to buy everything they ask for. Part of a library's budget must be used to maintain an up-to-date collection of professional journals and magazines that will support the classes being taught and the teachers who teach them. Funds will also be needed for the purchase of expensive reference materials, especially electronic versions. The good news is that some journals or reference materials may not need to be purchased at all, as good materials are increasingly becoming available for free on the internet. The key issue for all of these things is the size of your library's budget, and you should not quietly acquiesce if this number is ridiculously low! Accreditation agencies usually require a set number of books for accreditation. They also want to see that a reasonable part of the program's operational budget (at least 3 percent in most cases) is designated for library purchases.

Very few of the unsolicited books sent from overseas will be of much use to your library. They may even become more expensive to receive than they are worth if they can't be processed as duty-free or duty-reduced items. It is much better for someone to send you a list of books from which you can select those which will actually be helpful. Items that are in poor condition shouldn't even be offered. It should also be understood that all donations will either be integrated into the existing collection, shared with another library or sold.

There are a variety of ways in which to learn about what might be useful to have in your library collection. The starting point is to listen to the suggestions of teachers as they develop their bibliographies for their classes. We may also drool over what is advertised in publishers' catalogs, though the reality of limited funds for

book purchases suggests that it is wise to only make selections after knowing a book's quality through reading book reviews. It can be helpful to visit other people's libraries to see what they have (especially in journals). You will also discover books that need to be purchased again as you do an annual inventory of your entire collection to see what might be missing (or completely worn out). If you choose to remove a book from the collection, the information on that book should be removed from the catalog.

Your library staff will need to maintain four separate lists:

1. A wish list of books that you hope to acquire as funds become available
2. A list of books ready to be ordered
3. A list of books that have already been ordered (so that you don't inadvertently order them again during the months while you are waiting for them to come)
4. A list of books that have been received and are being processed, but which aren't yet on the shelves (to let impatient professors know that what they need is almost ready).

It can be very beneficial to be part of a consortium with a Catholic school or a secular university. Your library will include a good collection of evangelical titles that you can share with them. They will hopefully have everything else which they will be willing to share with you. You can either allow other students or faculty to use your facilities, with your students having the right to their library, or you could develop a system of interlibrary loans. A library collection can grow exponentially as it acquires the equipment (and the expertise) to allow it to take advantage of the massive amount of research information and articles available through information technology. Students will need help in sorting through the quality of what they find. Bibliographic research can be done online, with certain books and journals available for free. Full access to the collections of other

schools is not yet a reality, although there are a variety of projects to digitize just about anything.²

So perhaps there is hope for multiplying our collections in the relatively near future. Electronic subscription services for journals may be costly, but can be worth the price if they allow for access to a number of periodicals that could be useful to students and teachers.

Library Facilities

In the same way that men who don't cook shouldn't design kitchens, deciding how to build and design a library is not a task that should be left to teachers, administrators or architects. You need the help of a trained librarian to create a functional library. Ask for help if you are considering building a library or re-designing the one that you have, especially if you don't already have a trained librarian!

An excellent library facility needs to have comfortable and adequate space for all the activities that will be connected with the library. For security reasons, there should be only one main entrance to the library collection (with emergency exits, of course). The circulation desk should be located at that entrance so that materials can be returned easily and so that nothing can be removed from the library without checking it out properly.

As the library's catalog is where most research begins, it should also be located near the main entrance, which means that it will also be near to where someone could answer questions. If you have an electronic catalog, make sure that it is user friendly and that you have access to good local technical support. Reserved reading material also should be located somewhere near the front desk, though popular periodicals and newspapers may be placed where people can sit and talk without disturbing others. A library needs a separate room for workspace with lots of shelves for supplies and for books to be processed or repaired.

Books need to be on the shelves and available to students. To allow your collection to grow, books probably shouldn't take up more than approximately 70 percent of any given shelf. Contrary to popular belief most books don't disappear, though they can seem to if they have been misfiled on a shelf. It is better to let someone who knows what they are doing reshelve books that have been used.

If a library contains computers, and especially if the computers are connected to the internet, you will need a secure place to keep them with a password system that will control who has access to the internet. (You may also want a control system to block access to inappropriate websites.) Heat and humidity can reduce the life of a computer by as much as a third, so the costs of installing and running air conditioning may be less than the cost of replacing computers that wear out faster than they need to.

All libraries need adequate lighting and to find ways to dampen echoes and noise. If at all possible, a library should have an air-flow system to control dust and humidity. Both of these are very hard on your books, so the cost of installing, running and maintaining a climate-control system is off-set by the reduced cost of having to replace materials.

How much study space is needed in a library depends on many factors. It is helpful for upper-level students to have their own semi-private space for their research. For everyone else, how much study space you need will depend on usage. If all students are required to do their homework in the library at the same times, you will obviously need space for tables and chairs to accommodate every single one of them. However, if you don't have this kind of required study hall, you will need to conduct a survey to get a sense of library usage and plan accordingly. Some students don't have study space at home and may study in the library even if it isn't required. Have enough space so that your library doesn't feel crowded.

² See for example: <https://books.google.com/> or <http://scholar.google.com/>.



Brazil

by Scott Kenson

Seminário Batista Regular do Sul



The Seminário Batista Regular do Sul (SBRS), known in English as the Regular Baptist Seminary of the South, was started in southern Brazil in the late 1970s by Baptist Mid-Mission missionaries with the distinctive goal of training residential ministry students. Though not the first seminary in the region, the other seminaries were non-residential, with students traveling in from the surrounding area each day for their studies.

SBRS was just a dream until 1978. After years of prayer and an extensive search of the area, the Lord provided a property. Classes began a year later in 1979. Over the ensuing years, SBRS has trained a considerable number of graduates who have since dedicated their lives to the ministry. Notably, since 2007, an estimated 75% of all SBRS graduates have continued to serve in local church ministry.

SBRS is located in Curitiba, approximately 6 hours southwest of metropolitan Sao Paulo in southern Brazil. Currently, the school offers six degree programs, spanning from a one-year Bible program for laypeople to a four-year Bachelor of Theology. The curriculum includes

academic classes, such as theology and Bible studies, ministerial training, such as pastoral ministry and counseling, and practical classes, such as how to prepare visuals for a Sunday School program and puppetry.

Students hail from many regions across Brazil. The institution's highly structured residency program, which adheres to conservative theological principles and worship practices, is recognized by many as an important facet of the educational process. Most students come from churches established by BMM missionaries or from churches pastored by SBRS graduates. To be eligible for admission, applicants must possess a high school diploma, demonstrate active membership in a local Baptist church for a minimum of one year, and secure approval from their home church to attend SBRS. While tuition fees are substantial, equating to nearly the equivalent of a minimum wage salary, most students find that the rigorous program justifies the financial investment.

BMM Missionary Ed Alexander has served as the Director of SBRS since 2007. He describes SBRS as an intensive training academic



SBRS is an intensive training institute dedicated to equipping local churches to prepare men and women for all aspects of church ministry.



institution that is designed to aid local churches in the training men and women for every aspect of church ministry. He emphasizes that the training program equips both men and women for a lifelong career of dedicated and productive ministry. This comprehensive program is built on a structured academic curriculum, complemented by a personalized discipleship program to help students grow spiritually and additional extracurricular meetings focused on family dynamics and family ministry for married and engaged students.

During their time of study at SBRS, all students are assigned to serve in two distinct local churches. To fulfill this commitment, they must complete a comprehensive checklist outlining eight areas of ministry experience, including evangelism, discipleship, song leading, administration, teaching/preaching, and visitation. This ministry practicum ensures that students actively engage in ministry and experience a diverse range of ministry opportunities within the local church community.

Regarding any additions or changes to the current curriculum, Ed expresses a desire for a

more pronounced academic focus on missions, potentially including the establishment of a mission's degree program. He observed that a significant number of graduates leave SBRS equipped to embark on local church ministry, while a substantially smaller proportion perceives themselves as adequately prepared for missionary service or church planting endeavors. Ed's aspiration is to stimulate a change of mindset that will result in a greater number of graduates who engage in pioneering work.

SBRS has not pursued accreditation due to the financial burden, administrative challenges, and governmental regulations associated with the process. Nonetheless, graduates may complete an additional year of study at one of the other accredited institutions in Brazil, thereby obtaining a fully recognized Bachelor of Theology degree.

The faculty of SBRS is a diverse group of national pastors, pastors' wives, and three missionary units. Most of the instructors have authored their own course materials, drawing upon their ministry experiences and training.

This approach connects the biblical material with the ministry needs of Brazil. Because national pastors receive a full salary from their local churches, SBRS provides them with a supplemental income comparable to a minimum wage. This financial arrangement enables SBRS to manage operational costs effectively while demonstrating appreciation for the teachers.

SBRS is currently engaged in the process of nationalization. The school has established a national board of directors and is actively seeking a qualified candidate to assume leadership of SBRS. Furthermore, SBRS is striving to secure greater financial support from Brazilian churches. Currently, 25% of the funding originates from international sources, while the remaining 75% is from student tuition and local church contributions. Two additional long-term objectives include maintaining a

consistent student body of approximately 25-30 students and ensuring that all professors hold at least a Master of Arts degree.

Ed expresses gratitude for numerous graduates who faithfully serve the Lord, upholding conservative theological and worship practices for many years. He also acknowledges the contributions of numerous Brazilian pastors in nurturing the next generation of local church leadership, challenging younger believers to assume the mantle of ministry.

Regarding long-term prayer requests, Ed presents three specific requests: the maintenance of an average student enrollment of 25-30 students per year; the identification and selection of a qualified candidate to lead the seminary; the complete nationalization of the school.



Top left: Ed & Jan Alexander



Top middle and right:
SBRS
graduation

Bottom right:
SBRS campus



Digital Libraries

by James Peavy

Rat de bibliothèque (French), *ratón de biblioteca* (Spanish), and *leseratte* (German) are colloquial idioms that translate in English to “library rat” or “bookworm.” Most, if not all, who go into theological education ministry have spent hours on end with books spread out across a table in the middle of library stacks. It is a rite of passage of sorts for seminary students in the United States, one which educators desire for their students but is incredibly difficult to reproduce in a foreign context. Regardless of the challenges, all seminaries have a responsibility to actively search for ways to provide resources and access for students and faculty in a way that supports the school’s mission.

The number of volumes is not everything, and most agree that qualitative criteria are more important than quantitative ones. However, the fact remains that in many ministry contexts both library size and resource quality are next to impossible hurdles for a small, missionary-led seminary in the two-thirds world. Fortunately, in the past twenty years the number of available resources in Spanish speaking Latin America has exploded following a greater push from North American based publishing houses. Nonetheless, the process of importing and housing a library of 5,000-10,000 physical volumes is an expensive logistical nightmare. Then there is long-term care of the investment, oftentimes in tropical climates that destroy books if the room where they are housed is not climate controlled. Also, if a school does manage to fill the shelves of a library, the concept of returning that which is borrowed is often counter-cultural and the possibility of bought resources disappearing is very high. Finally, if the ministry context is in a language other than English, one is more than likely overwhelmed by the sheer lack of physical resources in their target language. So, what is the solution?

First, I believe that there must be a continued emphasis on the effort to provide physical resources for students. Although there may not be as many options in each language, every theological institution should be in the book business in one way or another, regardless of how difficult it may be. It may mean translating works, prioritizing the ones that are the most useful in the ministry context. It might also mean teaching English in order for students to be able to do quality research, similar to the way that learning a theological research language is a common requirement for PhD studies. Furthermore, in a world filled with screens, the tactile feel of the pages of a book is refreshing. The fact that physical books can be shared by more than one person is also a major advantage against the limitations of digital licensing. Physical books are also more trustworthy in that they cannot be altered or have a license revoked. If a seminary leader is looking to build a physical library there are organizations that exist to supply theological resources to the majority world, such as Overseas Publishing and Literature (OPAL) and the Theological Book Network. On several occasions our ministry in the Dominican Republic has recieved visitors with suitcases full of books that have been donated to the seminary's library. It is worth the effort.

Second, in this digital age in which we live, seminary leadership would be wise to invest in digital resources and technology as a means of completing the school's mission. Physical books should not be the only solution, nor are they always the best solution in every context. Any school that offers distant educational opportunities must also consider the responsibility to those students that occasionally or may never set foot on campus. Ministries that serve creative-access nations or schools in places where it is logistically impossible to import physical resources would benefit from investing in digital libraries. There are two primary types of digital databases that are available, free and paid.

For the free side, there are options such as Google Scholar, Google Theological Journals Search, Open Access Digital Theological Library, Directory of Open Access Journals, and much more. The point is to curate a quality open access or public domain library in a place that is easy to access, such as a student page on the school's website or through links in a learning management software. For those ministering in languages

other than English, the recent developments in artificial intelligence provide instant website translation and can even translate full articles or books with the click of a mouse. Even with these advancements there is no comparison to the quality of traditional translation from a publisher, but they do open the door to deeper research and broader exposure to ideas. However, it is not as simple as placing links on a website and then going on with business as usual. The key is facilitating access to the students through trained staff that can teach students and faculty on how to do quality research using these open-source options. One needs to be intentional in advising students on how to navigate the websites, use search queries, and even evaluate AI rendered translations.

For paid resources, consider investing in technology and software that will facilitate the completion of the school's mission. There are several options, but a few are the Logos volume licensing and academic programs, a Bibliotech subscription, or a membership with Global Digital Theological Library or Galaxy Theological Journal Library. With Logos licenses one can create a custom library or go with the already curated academic library for a one-time purchase. Depending on the number of licenses purchased, it can range from \$40-80 per student. The benefit though is that the student, once graduated, keeps that license for life. The membership or subscription-based options are cheaper in the short run, but once the student leaves the school, they lose access to the database. Much like the open-source options previously mentioned, it all hinges on the professional development of staff that can then help students use the tools that are at their disposal.

The biggest challenge is not the availability of digital libraries; it is justifying the funding. Most schools already have a very limited budget and trying to find funds for a digital library, which cannot be physically displayed, is oftentimes hard to rationalize. It is nonetheless a valuable endeavor.

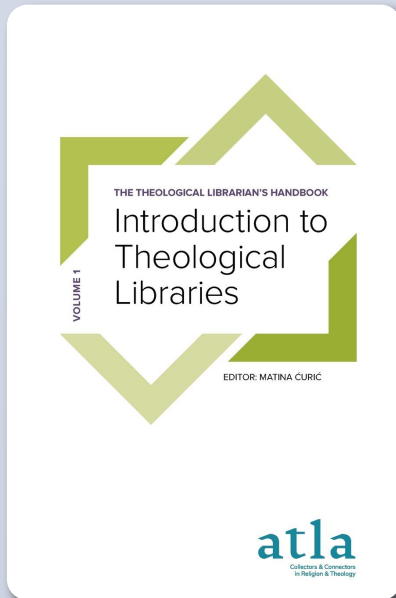
An essential aspect of theological education is to develop critical thinking instead of simple regurgitation of the professor's notes. If we are helping students engage their cultural context from a biblical worldview, providing them with the resources needed to accomplish that goal should find its way into the budget of the school. Let's help them become bookworms.

STEP Book Recommendations

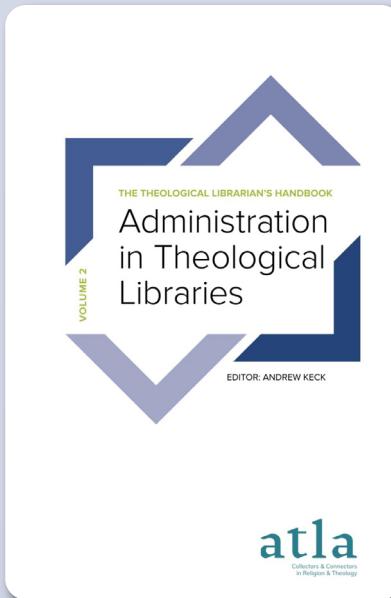
SUMMER 2025

- *The Theological Librarian's Handbook* (4 book series)

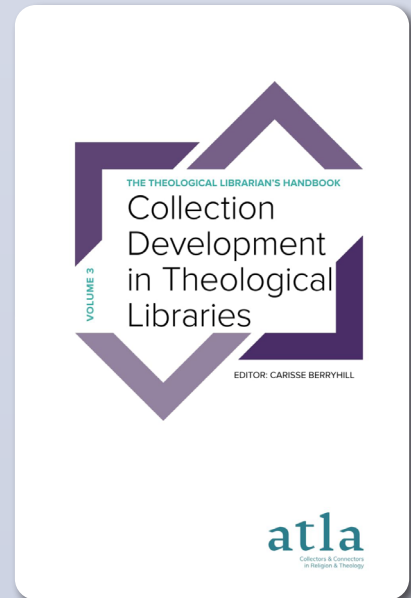
VOLUME 1



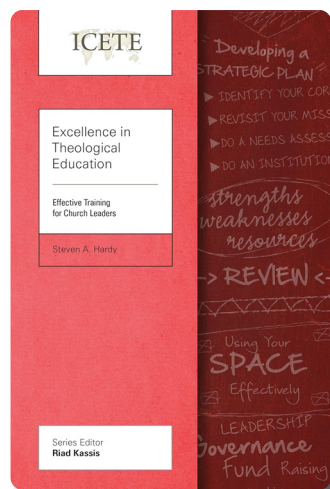
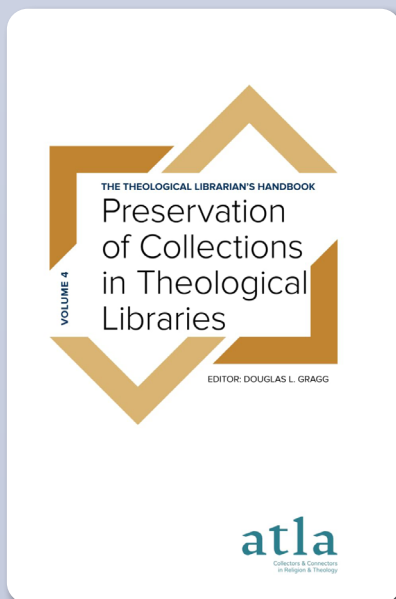
VOLUME 2



VOLUME 3



VOLUME 4



- *Excellence in Theological Education (ICETE)*

Check out an excerpt about theological libraries from this resource on page two of this newsletter!